



Brussels Studies

La revue scientifique électronique pour les recherches
sur Bruxelles / Het elektronisch wetenschappelijk
tijdschrift voor onderzoek over Brussel / The e-journal
for academic research on Brussels

Collection générale | 2011

Commercial transactions and social relations between the Greeks and Turks of Brussels

Transactions commerciales et relations sociales entre Grecs et Turcs de Bruxelles

Handelstransacties en sociale relaties tussen Grieken en Turken van Brussel

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/brussels/1060>

DOI: 10.4000/brussels.1060

ISSN: 2031-0293

Publisher

Université Saint-Louis Bruxelles

Electronic reference

Katerina Seraïdari, « Commercial transactions and social relations between the Greeks and Turks of Brussels », *Brussels Studies* [Online], General collection, no 53, Online since 24 October 2011, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/brussels/1060> ; DOI : 10.4000/brussels.1060



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Number 53, October 24th 2011. ISSN 2031-0293

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Commercial transactions and social relations between the Greeks and Turks of Brussels

Translation: Gabriëlle Leyden

This article examines how the extent to which Greeks and Turks 'live together' in Brussels can be measured by means of commercial transactions. The question is knowing what the impact of monetary exchanges on the symbolic borders between these social groups is and how these exchanges have changed over time. Whereas the market interactions between Greeks and Turks in the years that followed their moving to Brussels were defined by the attitude of affinity (out of conviction or necessity), those that occur today belong more to the framework of an urban cosmopolitanism defined by the attitude of indifference. Even if the commercial transactions constitute an area for hierarchizing the players, they also operate as a place of encounters or confrontation, where each person reinterprets his or her own national past and positions her/himself with regard to the legacy of the Greco-Turkish conflict and its representations.

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There is a slide show (by [Claude Dernoeden](#)) associated with this publication, which is inserted into the ePub version of the text, but can also be seen online (<http://vimeo.com/channels/BruS>)

Introduction

1. Belgium signed an immigration agreement with Greece in 1957 and another one with Turkey in 1964. The first Greek workers began arriving to work in Belgium's mines in 1955, and 10,195 Greeks were given work permits between 1955 and 1961 (Martens, 1976:101). Given their earlier arrival in the mining regions than the Turks, the Greeks, who already spoke the local language better and had had time to become familiar with the minor's trade and the country's cultural codes, forged ties of solidarity with the Turks, although they appeared strongly hierarchized. Even though these two immigrant minorities often lived in the same working-class neighbourhoods in Brussels, my qualitative investigations¹ show that the social ties between the two communities are currently rather limited.

2. Using the analytical tools of social anthropology, I conducted a series of in-depth semi-directed interviews (lasting from 3 to 7 hours) with ten second-generation Turkish immigrants (born in Belgium or having arrived as children) and twenty-five first- and second-generation Greek immigrants. I emphasised these life stories because these main informants had steady relations with members of the other ethnic community. In parallel, I conducted some thirty less extensive interviews

(lasting from 1 to 3 hours) with secondary informants. I also attended several events and festivities in which members of these two communities participated (I was a participating observer). The great majority of my informants felt that there were no particular problems between the two communities, but they did not have any special ties, either. The Greeks worked or were still working with the Turks in the same sectors (in Wallonia's mines until the 1970s, then in the factories, restaurant business, and services, but also in management positions). Nevertheless, this collaboration often remained strictly job-related. They also frequented the same neighbourhoods, schools, trade unions, grocery shops, and cafés. However, very few people forged lasting friendships. It seems that these two groups rubbed shoulders during two specific periods: first in the coal fields, then in certain underprivileged Brussels neighbourhoods into which the two groups moved in the 1970s². However, once socio-economic advancement allowed some of them to move to a privileged neighbourhood and move in more affluent circles, these neighbourly ties and bonds of camaraderie seem to have unravelled.

3. My informants often brought up historical events that were the source of the Turkish-Greek conflict: The Turks caused the fall of the Byzantine Empire and inflicted four centuries of "obscurantism and slavery" on the Greeks, whilst the Greeks, with their uprising for independence, were responsible for the Ottoman Empire's demise. These turbulent relations were also defined by contemporary geopolitical conflicts, such as the Cyprus crisis. In analysing the data collected during my field investigations, I was able to identify three behavioural attitudes

¹ Work done between October 2009 and June 2010 as part of a project on ties between these two communities called "Quand deux insularités socio-culturelles se côtoient au cœur de l'Europe: le rapport à l'intégration des communautés grecque et turque de Bruxelles et leurs relations mutuelles", financed by IRSIB (Profile A, "Brains (back) to Brussels" Agreement), under the supervision of Ural Manço (*Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis*).

² For an analysis of Belgium's Greek immigrant community, see Venturas (1999). Moutsou (2006) explains the fact that a larger percentage of the Greek community lives in Brussels as the result of their earlier arrival, for they were initially employed in the mines in the French-speaking part of Belgium, whereas the Turks, who came later, found work in the Flemish part of Belgium. The rate at which they moved to Brussels thus depended on the period of each ethnic group's arrival in Belgium, with the earlier arrivals consistently enjoying better conditions and being more able to weather economic crises. For an analysis of Belgium's Turkish immigrant community, see Manço (2000).



Fig. 1. Turkish café on the chaussée de Haecht.

that depended on the circumstances and context, but also on the individuals' interests and ideological positions. Each of these attitudes corresponds to a specific interpretation of this historical heritage, as follows:

- First attitude: hostility, confrontation, and phenomenon of reserve, creating distance between the two groups. Reference is made to negative stereotypes, and the 'weighty past' that separates them is considered to be an immutable given linked to the duty to remember. Those who advocate reconciliation and entente between the two peoples are considered to be traitors, opportunists, or romantics.
- Second attitude: cooperation and the brandishing of cultural affinity, leading to the consolidation of their ties. This attitude, which treats the disputes between Greeks and Turks as 'commonplace family quarrels', is justified by the fact that the members of these two communities are supposed to share a number of cultural traits, e.g., similar cooking styles, music, and dances. They are also defined by the pre-eminence of a traditionally patriarchal family structure, the importance of upholding family traditions, and the adoption of similar moral codes (such as the notion of honour). The two groups are marked not only by the same nostalgia for an idealised rural lifestyle and emotional ties to the 'motherland'³, but also by similar economic practices, since their two countries of origin have developed, to a great extent, informal economies structured around cronyism. These cultural similarities are considered to be the fruit of centuries of co-existence (which leads some to refer to the Greeks and Turks' 'mixed blood') and geographical proximity.
- Third attitude: indifference, which supposes that relations between Greeks and Turks are considered neither problematic nor privileged.

³ One might think that for the younger generations, the "motherland", honour, and the patriarchal structure are no longer absolute values. However, each generation defines these values its own way whilst remaining true to the family unit and "old country". This does not mean, for all that, that they cannot challenge these values as well. In actual fact, the individuals interpret these givens differently according to their education, political affinities, social class, and life experiences.

This attitude is based on recognition of the oneness of humankind.

4. This article examines the extent to which the Greeks and Turks' 'living together' in Brussels (made possible by the attitudes of affinity and indifference and jeopardised by the attitude of hostility⁴) can be measured by commercial transactions. According to Adam Smith's classic position, the social tie 'is achieved by means of a market where individuals who get along with each other but are guided by their own interests compete for the possession of rare property' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991:63). According to Smith, trade creates order, promotes peace, and ensures the individual's freedom and safety. The rationality of the market order is thus just the opposite of the irrational passion that nationalism creates. Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) challenge precisely this idea of elevating the market to the rank of a 'common higher principle', for commercial transactions do not just bring different social classes or ethnic groups in contact with each other⁵, but also categorise them by giving them specific characteristics. As Ma Mung (2006:84-85) says, the purchased product is 'support for operations of identification':

5. ...this box of washing powder bought from the Arab grocer in my neighbourhood is not the same as the identical box bought in a super-market...This product is characterised, defined by a special social relationship, that of a buyer who, through his representation of a seller, assimilates the latter with a group, the shopkeeping members of which he knows will offer a special service (being open on Sundays at 9 p.m.). What is important here is the assimilation with a social group, the fact that through the product and the action of trade, a social identity is

Fig. 2. Small Greek restaurant close to Gare du Midi.



⁴ My methodological choices led me to analyse the attitudes of affinity and indifference more than that of hostility. In fact, none of my main informants adopted this attitude of hostility, even though their discourse sometimes reproduced negative stereotypes. In the case of my main informants, the adoption of the hostile attitude, when it did occur, merely reflected specific circumstances.

⁵ Here I adopt Albert Bastenier's (1998:198) "functional definition of ethnicity": "...it is a social identification of oneself and others with a view to positioning [oneself] within hierarchized social groups".

conferred on an individual.

6. I shall first examine the stories of my second-generation informants, who carry the memory of the Greeks and Turks' cohabitation in Brussels's working-class neighbourhoods. I shall then analyse the stories of the Greeks who moved to Brussels after 1970 and whose interactions with members of the Turkish community are limited to commercial transactions with their Turkish grocers⁶. The question is what the impact of such monetary exchanges is on the symbolic borders that separate social groups (in this case, the Greeks and Turks of Brussels) and how these exchanges have changed over time.

1. The 'golden age of commerce'

7. Two Turkish informants confirmed the long co-existence of Greeks and Turks in the Brussels neighbourhood of Saint-Josse, where one was born and the other has lived since childhood. The first shopkeepers who sold Balkan products (feta cheese, olives, peppers, and tomato paste) to the neighbourhood's Turks were Greek. The father of one of my Turkish informants had emigrated to Wallonia in 1965 to work in the building trade and was one of the first Turks to open a grocery shop in the neighbourhood. That was in 1973. To support him and get products from their home country, Turks living in Wallonia made long trips at the weekend to buy his produce. This grocer, who managed to attract a clientele that did not live in the neighbourhood and whose business was not governed by the rules of proximity, bought his stock from a Greek wholesaler. The last Greek to have a grocery shop in the neighbourhood sold it to a Turk ten years ago and then retired. This testimony, which is not at all out of the ordinary, since it confirms other stories that the limited space in this article does not allow me to go into, reveals the sequence of ethnic groups in the neighbourhood

and its shops according to their order of arrival in Belgium and 'seniority' in the neighbourhood. This initially gave rise to the 'Greek owners-Turkish customers' configuration, as the latter were as a rule not as socially and economically well off as the former. It took a certain amount of time for the Turks to venture into commercial undertakings and open their own shops, a phenomenon that snowballed in the 1980s (Manço, 1994; Kesteloot and Mistiaen, 1997).

8. This story also reveals three points of analytical interest:

- 1. It shows the existence of an ethnic customer base: The Turks living in Wallonia who came to do their shopping in a compatriot's grocery shop in Brussels chose to spend their money according to ethnic criteria. At the same time, they satisfied their yen for products from the home country.
- 2. It reveals that Greeks and Turks' cohabitation in the same neighbourhood was consolidated by monetary exchanges: The existence of an ethnic customer base preventing local shops' being owned by another ethnic group would have thwarted the two groups' cohabitation and social intercourse and ethnic mixing in the neighbourhood. This means that the same people can operate as an ethnic clientele that prefers to give its custom to compatriots at times and as customers who choose a shop according to criteria of convenience (quality/price ratio, flexible hours, or geographical proximity), rather than the shop's owner's origins, at other times.
- 3. Consequently, depending upon the behavioural attitude chosen, when social actors do not make up an ethnic clientele, they can a) avoid buying in a shop run by a member of what they consider to be an 'enemy' group (attitude of hostility that could jeopardize the groups' peaceful cohabitation in the neighbourhood): in this case, a Turkish customer will prefer to buy from a shopkeeper who is not Greek⁷; b) prefer to buy from a shopkeeper who is assumed to share the same

⁶ The Greek and Turkish terms for grocer, *bakalis* and *bakkal*, respectively, actually come from Arabic. In this article, I analyse only the transactions that my informants recounted, without dwelling upon the transactions that I observed in the field.

⁷ Several informants told me of the momentary suspension of or decrease in social relations and commercial transactions between Greeks and Turks in Belgium during the Cyprus crisis.

consumption patterns (attitude of affinity): as a 'connoisseur' and consumer of similar cuisine, the Greek shopkeeper can meet his Turkish customers' requirements and guarantee good quality products (cultural rationale that makes the shopkeeper's origins meaningful); or c) choose to frequent shops without taking account of their owners' origins.

9. In *Les moutons sans berger : une histoire vraie*⁸, the Turkish writer Muharrem Türköz describes his childhood in the neighbourhood around Brussels's North Station in which Greeks, Moroccans, Italians, and a few Belgians also lived. He gives us some tidbits of information about the commercial transactions between Greeks and Turks at the time: His mother 'made the rounds of the second-hand shops to buy us clothes that were not too expensive. Greeks ran these shops. They understood Turkish. My mother could haggle over prices with them, arguing that she was a good customer' (page 7). The fact that the Greeks spoke Turkish and bargained facilitated the commercial transactions and created an area of familiarity. The Greeks, as vendors, wanted to build customer loyalty, whilst the Turks, as customers, wanted to bargain for discounts and save money by demanding respect for the rights that such loyalty conferred. The market worked traditionally in this framework, since personal ties persisted and influenced the bargaining over a deal, which assumed personal ties and a relationship of trust.

10. Another second-generation Turkish informant told me how a Greek family (the father had worked as a miner in Charleroi) moved to her neighbourhood in Anderlecht in 1969 and opened a grocery shop on the corner of her street. My informant was thirteen years old at the time and the Greek grocer's boy was eighteen. That is how their love story began. 'We saw each other in secret, because for our parents...it was out of the question'. Neither of my informants' parents did their



Fig. 3. Turkish snack-bar in Saint Gilles.

⁸ Published by De Sikkel in 1993. Here I've used an uncensored typed manuscript by the author lent to me by Mazyar Khoojinian; for which I thank him.

shopping in this Greek grocery shop, so they were not aware of the relationship. But she went there to buy what was missing for the day's meal, to do the last minute shopping, which enabled her to keep up this secret relationship. In 1983 she became pregnant, which prompted her to admit everything to her parents, after a secret relationship that had lasted fourteen years. Her parents accepted the fact, which in her opinion showed their open-mindedness, and she had two children with her Greek companion. Here, despite the fact that the Turkish family did not shop in the Greek grocery shop systematically, the few commercial transactions that were done when needed (by the family's eldest daughter) led to the development of a true love story between these two young people.

11. Although this last story was an individual, and thus not a representative, case, it took place within a general context of social and commercial interactions between Greeks and Turks in Brussels. In analysing a large number of accounts that I collected in the field, I was able to conclude that the attitude of affinity was justified in the 1970s and 1980s in two ways: a) by conviction (Greeks and Turks share some cultural traits, such as the predilection for 'Balkan' foods); and b) by necessity (the two groups were subject to the same rejection and difficulties in the Belgian socio-economic environment). As several Greek informants told me, the Greeks and Turks 'ate the same bitter bread together' (*fagane mazi pikro psomi*) in Belgium. The bonds of these common experiences were strengthened by the fact that they were living in a foreign country in which they shared codes that the Greeks of Greece and the Turks of Turkey did not have. To a great extent, the precariousness and uncertainties engendered by their immigrant status helped bring them closer. Their cooperation was thus reactive: In this situation, the mechanism of identification (in this case, adopting the attitude of affinity) was activated by the difficulties that they experienced as immigrants.



Fig. 4. Greek restaurant on the Grand-Place.

2. The growing importance of the attitude of indifference

12. The Greek immigrants who moved to Brussels after 1970 are anchored much more in the attitude of indifference, which is an attitude of convention rather than conviction (such as that of affinity or hostility). Most of these informants spoke of shopping at the neighbourhood Turkish grocery shop as the only ties that they had with a member of the Turkish community. There are two concomitant ways to explain this reaction, as follows:

- 1. Negative formulation: The two groups ignore each other, even though they live in the same city.
- 2. Positive formulation: Ethnicity is not a relevant criterion in choosing where to buy, as my informants bought from Turkish merchants the same way as Belgians did. In other words, the matter of ethnic origins plays little part in establishing trade relations.

13. These emotionally neutral relationships, which require little involvement from the buyers and sellers, are defined by recognition of the place that the Turks gradually occupied in commerce in Belgium. The association of an ethnic group with a specific trade has created the Belgian stereotype of the 'Turkish grocer'⁹ (just as the stereotype of the 'Arab grocer' prevails in France). So, Georgia¹⁰ gets her fruit from a Turkish grocer in an affluent neighbourhood (Woluwé); this is her only relationship with a member of the Turkish community. The shop sells Greek cheeses, olives, dill, lettuce, and beets, and a great many Greeks do their shopping there. They even have to queue up at the register.

Access to products that the Greek customers identify as 'their own' certainly explains these 'throngs' of Greek buyers.

14. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s Turkish immigrants went to Greek grocery shops to find the 'Balkan products' that they needed for their cuisine in this new environment, the movement has reversed, given the small number of Greek grocery shops that have survived and the large number of Turkish grocery shops that have opened their doors. In the earlier period, the Turkish customers belonged to the working class, whereas today the Greek customers are affluent and their food choices correspond to what they see as a refined and healthy lifestyle. Thanks to their origins, these Greeks can put themselves forward as 'innate connoisseurs'¹¹ of 'organic' produce. Their cosmopolitanism is paradoxically confirmed by their purchasing 'national' products from a Turkish shopkeeper.

15. According to Georgia, the Turkish woman who owns the grocery shop (and is a mother of four) has succeeded in amassing a fortune. She bought a flat with a pool in Ankara, and then opened a second grocery shop in Brussels. She married her (seventeen-year-old) eldest daughter to a Turk whom the parents had chosen: 'They imported him (*eisagogi ton kanane*) to have him work in the grocery shop...Half of Turkey came for the engagement party. The men ate in one hall and the women were in another hall, separate from the men. They ate only when they were not serving the men'.

16. Georgia (who has three single daughters, each of whom rents her own flat in Brussels), also wanted to underline the fact that this Turkish

⁹ For the reactions triggered by the fact that all of the grocers in Cheratte are Turkish, which makes it difficult to get pork products, see Parthoens and Manço (2005:147). For a summary of urban minorities' mediating role in the economic activity of a city, see Raulin (2009). For an overview of the issue of ethnic shops, see Berbagui (2005).

¹⁰ Born in a provincial town in the Peloponnese, this woman (whose name I have changed) had already lived in Athens for twelve years before coming to Brussels in 1982, at the age of 34, when her husband got a job with the European Institutions. She ventured into the retail trade in Brussels in 1987 and currently has a shop in the Schuman neighbourhood, where her customers are Eurocrats. For an analysis of how Eurocrats define themselves as being cosmopolitan and open to diversity, see Gatti (2009). See also Abélès (1992), who examines Eurocrats as a "tribe" with its own totems, cultural codes, and customs.

¹¹ Whilst the Greek or Turkish vendor's expertise is linked to his or her "innate knowledge" of the produce and foods that the customers belonging to these groups (regardless of their social class) appreciate, in this case another form of knowledge is involved, that of the affluent Greek buyer who has made the transition from a traditional lifestyle to a diet that becomes "noble" once it has been legitimated by the recent value attributed to the Mediterranean diet, which is considered to be particularly well balanced. In this article, I shall examine neither my Turkish nor Greek informants' tendencies to refer to the Balkan or Mediterranean region, respectively, as a preferential mode of identification.



family continued to reproduce outmoded traditional cultural models, despite its urban origins and economic success, as if once immigrants finished climbing the social ladder, they had to change their mentalities and habits and redefine their values. Georgia is also critical of the Greek immigrants (miners and blue-collar workers): 'They insist on ouzo, *kombolói* [the worry beads that Greek men play with], a tourist's vision of Greece, and then the priests and blessings (*papades*, *agiastoures*). But another Greece is developing, one that they have refused to see'.

17. There is a certain similarity between her criticism of the Greek immigrants' failing to keep abreast of the changes in mentality that took place after they left and her criticism of the Turks' traditional way of life. In both cases, the immigrants are presented as being trapped in a void in time that prevents them evolving in step with their host and home societies alike. This impression of standing still denies them all adaptability, even though this is one of the immigrants' main qualities, as my investigations have revealed. However, whilst the story postulates that the first group is lagging behind those who remained in the old country, it lumps all of the members of the second group together: It is not just the Turkish immigrants who have remained 'backward', but all Turks are more 'traditionalist' than the Greeks and, more generally speaking, Europeans.

18. This account also shows that the relationship between the Turkish vendor and Greek customer is not impersonal: Georgia wanted to know more about her grocer's background and achievements. That is why she asked her so many questions about her family and lifestyle. In this case, the commercial transactions opened the door to a process of relative inter-knowledge, even though one has the impression that the information gleaned about the Turkish grocer's life merely confirmed the cognitive reading key already in place. These new 'Turkish owner-Greek



Fig. 5 (previous page). Turkish restaurant on the *chaussée de Haecht*.

Fig. 6 (opposite). Greek snack-bar in the « *pitta street* » (*rue du Marché aux Fromages*), close to the *Grand-Place*.

customer' relations that indicate the Turks' economic and entrepreneurial emancipation thus remain hierarchical, despite the role reversal from the 'Greek owner-Turkish customer paradigm of the 1970s-1980s.

19. After telling me that he was the best customer of the Turkish shops in his neighbourhood, another Greek¹² related the following incident: One day, a second-generation Turkish immigrant girl who was serving him in a Turkish grocery asked him whether he was Greek. He answered that he was, which she followed up with 'You know that we are supposed to be enemies?' And he replied, 'And do you now consider me to be an enemy?' The girl replied that she considered him simply a customer. When he told her that he did not consider her to be an enemy, either, the girl drew the following conclusion: 'So, when people say that we are enemies, they are lying'. In the specific circumstances of this exchange between the Turkish vendor and Greek customer, the vendor reasoned as follows: 'You are a customer, so you cannot be an enemy, no matter if you are Greek.' Here we are in the register of the daily routine of trade that links individuals who are not supposed to feel drawn to each other because of their ethnic origins: The market interaction not only makes their origins meaningless, but also makes it possible to conclude that the Greek-Turkish conflict is a lie. In other words, it produces a form of certainty and a cognitive given.

20. According to this informant, one-off encounters and spontaneous exchanges of this type can have an effect on people's lives and make them think about their positions in the political arena. He used this story to show me that whilst Greek politicians have managed to shift their constituents from hostility to affinity for Turkey since the 1990s¹³, the attitude of indifference is the one that guarantees a relationship with 'the right distance' and refers to the adoption of forms of civility. In this case, the indifferent attitude is presented as being less vulnerable to being instrumentalized. As this attitude is linked to the need to adjust one's behaviour in line with the multicultural reality of modern societies

(characterised by the growing movement of people and goods), it introduces a new political vision of the world in which nationalistic quarrels (such as the one between Greece and Turkey) are perceived to be obsolete.

21. In this framework, one must avoid exaggerated demonstrations of familiarity, but at the same time all forms of confrontation are to be condemned, for they are a form of incivility that could thwart the commercial transaction: All market relations must be based on being civil and courteous, *i.e.*, these signs of 'superficiality' and commonness that define the attitude of indifference. Nevertheless, commercial transactions can always take a bad turn. One second-generation Turkish informant who had worked for years in the restaurant that her brother opened in an affluent part of Brussels told me about the following incident:

22. I was serving, a bloke ordered, then he asked me, 'Are you Turkish?', because I was speaking with my cousin in Turkish, and I answered, 'Yes', and he got up to leave. And I told him, 'And you, what are you?' and he said, 'Greek'. 'You're a dirty Greek,' I told him. Because it [what he did] was impolite. He was a Greek from Greece, because the Greeks from here don't do that. He was a Greek Greek...

23. This woman, who grew up in a blue-collar Brussels neighbourhood where Greeks and Turks lived side by side, made a distinction between 'Greek Greeks' and 'Greeks from here', with the former alleged to be more chauvinistic and narrow-minded than the latter. This Greek man's 'impolite' refusal to eat in a restaurant run by Turks was not the rational decision of someone who appreciated or scorned a business because of the quality of its cooking and quality/price ratio. By refusing to engage in a commercial transaction¹⁴ with Turks, this Greek adopted an attitude of hostility from the very outset, an attitude that, according to this informant, a 'Greek from here' would never have had.

¹² Who came to Leuven in 1967 to pursue his university studies and then moved to the Schuman neighbourhood in Brussels in the early 1970s. I decided to give some biographical information about Georgia and this informant because they are the only ones mentioned in this article who were not part of the blue-collar immigrant workforce.

¹³ For more on these developments in Greek-Turkish relations, see Bilici (2005).

¹⁴ For other ethnographic examples of rejected transactions, see Semi (2005).

Conclusions

24. The attitude of indifference presents the fact that 'we are all human beings' as something to be taken for granted. In so doing, it opens up what could be called 'the curve of brotherhood' to include all of humankind, which is recognition of the need to adjust to the new demands of a globalised world. The attitude of affinity recognises the existence of specific fraternal ties between Greeks and Turks; it closes the curve slightly and supports the need to distinguish between the nations and populations with whom one has a shared history and the rest. The attitude of hostility closes the curve completely by considering that peace cannot be restored to the relations between these two peoples.

25. Whereas the market interactions between Greeks and Turks in the years that followed their moving to Brussels were defined by the attitude of affinity (out of conviction or necessity), those that are taking place today belong more to the urban cosmopolitanism defined by the attitude of indifference. To a certain extent, we have gone from the 'village spirit' that reigned in the working-class neighbourhoods where shopkeepers provided information and services and played an important part in consolidating neighbourly ties to another configuration in which the good customer is one who shows open-mindedness: By frequenting Turkish grocery shops, the Greeks of Brussels demonstrate their cosmopolitanism and powers of adaptation in this city – the 'heart of Europe' – and differentiate themselves from the 'Greeks of Greece', whose experience of multiculturalism is more limited. The economic exchange thus has a symbolic purpose, since it acts as a means of introduction to a globalised culture (which has acquired a certain social value as a marker of distinction) and thus, as a process of acquiring and maintaining a specific social identity. Even if the commercial transactions constitute an area for hierarchizing the social actors, they also operate as a place of encounters or confrontation, where each person reinterprets her/his own national past and positions her/himself with regard to the legacy of the Greco-Turkish conflict and its representations.

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To cite this text

Katerina SERAÏDARI, « Commercial transactions and social relations between the Greeks and Turks of Brussels », *Brussels Studies*, Number 53, October 24th 2011, www.brusselsstudies.be

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